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### **ROMANTICISM AND THE TRANSATLANTIC IMAGINATION: BLANCO WHITE, KEATS, AND THE LIBERAL DILEMMA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay focuses on the role of Spanish America in the development of British romantic period literature, particularly in relation to that literature's engagement with the political controversies surrounding Britain's uneven development as both a world empire and a modern liberal state. By linking the histories and writings of these two geographies, particularly between the 1780 Peruvian revolt and the Spanish American independence movements (1817-1822), this project seeks to uncover the complex but largely ignored political and literary crossings triangulating between Britain, Spain, and Latin America during the early nineteenth century. In doing so, it reconstructs the transatlantic political and intellectual context for literary figurations of Spanish America in order to examine the historical dimensions that allowed British writers José María Blanco White and John Keats to imagine Latin America as both an important horizon of colonial desire and an object of liberal fantasies of independence and liberation.

**KEYWORDS:** Transatlantic Romanticism, Spanish Influence on British Liberal Thought, Britain and Spanish America, John Keats, José María Blanco White, Hannah More.

#### **EL ROMANTICISMO Y LA IMAGINACIÓN TRANSATLÁNTICA: BLANCO WHITE, KEATS Y EL DILEMA LIBERAL**

**RESUMEN:** Este ensayo se centra en el papel de la América española en el desarrollo de la literatura británica durante el período romántico, especialmente en relación con la participación de la literatura en las controversias políticas que rodean el desarrollo sin parangón de Gran Bretaña como un imperio mundial y como un estado liberal moderno. Mediante la vinculación de las historias y los escritos de estas dos zonas geográficas, en particular en los años entre la revuelta de 1780 del Perú y los movimientos hispanoamericanos de independencia (1817-1822), este proyecto trata de descubrir los complejos cruces políticos y literarios, ignorados en gran medida, que triangulan entre Gran Bretaña, España

y América Latina durante el siglo XIX. De este modo, se reconstruye el contexto político transatlántico e intelectual de las figuraciones literarias de la América española con el fin de examinar las dimensiones históricas que permitieron a los escritores británicos José María Blanco White y John Keats imaginar América Latina como un importante horizonte del deseo colonial y a la vez como objeto de las fantasías liberales de independencia y liberación.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Romanticismo Transatlántico, Influencia española en el pensamiento liberal de Gran Bretaña, España e Hispanoamérica, John Keats, José María Blanco White, Hannah More.

This essay is part of a larger research project that focuses on the role of Spanish America in the development of British romantic period literature, particularly in relation to that literature's engagement with the political controversies surrounding Britain's uneven development as both a world empire and a modern liberal state. By linking the histories and writings of these two geographies through archival research of British and Spanish American texts, particularly in the years between the 1780 Peruvian revolt and the Spanish American independence movements of the so-called Bolívar Wars (1817-1822), this research project seeks to uncover the complex but largely ignored political and literary crossings triangulating between Britain, Spain, and Latin America during the early part of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, it reconstructs the transatlantic literary, political, and intellectual context for literary figurations of Spanish America in order to examine the historical dimensions that allowed British writers to imagine Latin America as both an important horizon of colonial desire and an object of liberal fantasies of independence and liberation. By exploring the latent connection between Britain's support of Latin American revolts from Spain and Britain's longstanding desire to open Spanish American markets to British trade, I argue that Latin America became an important topography through which British writers worked out the apparent ideological conflicts inherent in Britain's coeval development of an imperial ideology premised on the subordination of difference —racial, economic, and other— and British liberal thought, which conversely emphasized the universal equality of free citizens.

Such a project furthers the current trend in British romantic studies that stresses the importance of reassessing early-nineteenth-century British literature within a transnational, global, and most recently, a transatlantic context.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the study of U. S. American literature has benefited immensely from the work of critics like Paul Giles, Gretchen Murphy, Felipe Fernández-Armesto, and others whose scholarship challenges the notion of American exceptionalism by resituating the study of literature of

<sup>1</sup> A few notable exceptions in recent years ought to be mentioned: Rebecca Cole Heinowitz's *Spanish America and British Romanticism, 1780-1826: Rewriting Conquest* (2010) and Joselyn Almeida-Beveridge's *Reimagining the Transatlantic, 1780-1890* (2011) and *Romanticism and the Anglo-Hispanic Imaginary* (2010). These works represent the exciting new scholarship emerging on the topic of Latin America and British Romanticism that call for more work on this still relatively underexplored topic. This paper answers that call by expanding the discussion of issues of empire to include the complex political developments surrounding what I call the liberal dilemma. For historical works exploring the political dimensions of Britain's relationship to Latin America, see Elliott; Portillo Valdés; Esdaile; and Wright.

<sup>2</sup> Since the announcement of the proliferation of work on global issues in romantic studies in the 1997 special edition of *European Romantic Review* on «British Romanticism: Global Crossings» (Fay, 1997), more work continues to be produced reassessing British romanticism as explicitly international and global in its concerns. For foundational work on British romantic imperialism, see Makdisi, Fulford, Bewell, and Leask (2004). For work on romantic travel writing, global feminisms, and cosmopolitanisms, see Mellor, Simpson, and Leask (2002). Hanley and Kucich also provide an excellent introduction to recent critical interest in what is increasingly being termed the «global nineteenth century» (2004: 309).

the United States within a wider Hemispheric or Pan-American geographical context.<sup>3</sup> Both disciplines are thus increasingly guided by the principle that national boundaries can no longer be regarded as viable categories for discrete study and that new critical paradigms are needed if we are to investigate what literary critics have identified as the inescapable intersections of cultures across the globe.

Transatlantic studies, particularly as an emerging discipline in the humanities, has been especially central in generating new conceptual frameworks for thinking through the complex issues related to the interconnectedness of Atlantic rim cultures, specifically as it relates to how cultures, ideologies, and political identities are reworked and reinscribed by the transatlantic movement and circulation of people, ideas, and cultural artifacts, especially literary texts.<sup>4</sup> Transatlantic concepts like Paul Gilroy's the «Black Atlantic», Stuart Hall's «cultural identity and the diaspora», and Joseph Roach's «circum-Atlantic performance» have been especially crucial to our thinking about the points of intersection between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite the new critical imperative to explore the cross-cultural exchanges of Atlantic-rim cultures, the Spanish-speaking world remains one of the most understudied cultural geographies of the period among Anglophone disciplines, despite the fact that Spanish America makes up half of what in terms of Atlantic studies might be called the South Atlantic.

Much of this neglect no doubt has to do with the vast critical terrain only recently opened to us by transatlantic studies, a field, notwithstanding the number of important works on the topic, we have only begun to explore.<sup>6</sup> But to some degree, we must also be aware, as Diego Saglia has argued, of an English disciplinary resistance to all «things Spanish» and, in Joselyn Almeida's view, a dangerous assumption underlying recent transatlantic critical practices, namely that the ideas, texts, and political thought circulating within the Atlantic world occur primarily between Britain and the US and are, as a consequence, conducted primarily in English (2011: 33).<sup>7</sup> The consequences of such critical practices —of, among other things, continuing to think of the Americas in terms of North America alone— is that we not only risk marginalizing Spanish speakers as minor spectators on the world stage, but also risk confining transatlantic studies, as Almeida has written, within safe linguistic boundaries that ultimately work to reinscribe the disciplinary structures that transatlantic studies has worked so hard to break through (2011: 126).

Addressing these recent disciplinary concerns, this essay begins with the observation that during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Spanish Atlantic was not only *not* on the margins of global affairs, but in fact arguably commanded the world stage. Beginning with the 1780s Andean rebellion through the Bolívar Wars of the 1820s, the fiery brilliance of revolutionaries like Antonio Nariño, Francisco de Miranda, San Martín, and the *libertador* himself, Simón Bolívar, ignited the world's imagination with their explosive struggle for independence. With republics springing up first in Venezuela in 1810, soon followed by Buenos Aires and New Granada, then Chile and finally

3 In addition to the critics mentioned above, see also Kaplan, Dunkerley, Brickhouse, and Bauer. All of these critics in various ways have sought to expand the geographical context in which American literature is considered, preferring a Hemispheric or global approach to the study of American literature over a more narrow U.S. national framework.

4 For a useful introduction to transatlantic literary studies as a discipline, see Manning.

5 All citations refer to the titles of the articles in which these concepts were first introduced.

6 Although a rich Spanish critical tradition exists surrounding Spain's transatlantic connections with the Americas, the focus of this essay is on the shifting disciplinary structures within humanities departments in Britain and the U. S., a field of study most succinctly presented in the introduction to Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor's edited collection *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader* (2007).

7 See the introduction to Almeida's recently published *Reimagining the Transatlantic, 1780–1890* (2011).

Mexico, Latin America soon rivaled their North American neighbors in political innovation and radical change. Back in Europe, Spain was experiencing its own revolution of sorts. With the invasion of Napoleon in 1808, Spain not only found itself locked in a life and death struggle for national autonomy, but also became deeply engaged in its own political experimentations. The rise of the liberal intelligentsia in Spain, self-dubbed *liberales*, fought to secure their national sovereignty against Napoleon, but more importantly they viewed the political crisis as a rare opportunity for political and social reform, an opportunity to completely revamp and modernize the Spanish government, transform its traditional social structure, and draft a constitution along more liberal and revolutionary lines.<sup>8</sup>

As the site of wars and invasions, revolutions and constitutional inventions, the Spanish Atlantic opened up a new space for political and ideological discussion that touched on key issues of national and imperial concerns in Europe. The imperial relationship between Spain and its colonies at a time when both the colonies and metropole were formulating new ideas about individual autonomy, national sovereignty, and civil liberties brought into full view the inescapable conflict between liberal thought and the logic of empire. As an early sympathizer to Latin American independence movements and now recent ally of Spain, Britain found itself caught between its moral obligation to support Latin American claims for freedom against tyranny and oppression, and their political responsibilities to honor their new alliance with the Peninsula.<sup>9</sup> Yet, Britain had ulterior motives at play. Long coveting Latin American markets, Britain knew that the independence of Spanish America meant an opportunity to expand its commercial empire. Thus, placed in a position of savior to Spain and Latin American's hope for independence, Britain became an increasingly significant and politically charged space of converging and conflicting interests, the place of revolutionary plotting on the one hand—Miranda, Bolívar, and others all developed their revolutionary programs in London—and the source of a growing pro-Spanish patriotism demanding British aid to Spain against their French oppressors.<sup>10</sup>

It was the power of the British press, I will argue, and the willingness of both Americans and *Peninsulares* to make use of it, that made London a dynamic hub of an emerging bilingual, transatlantic discourse in which the interests of empire and the ideals of liberal thought were debated, contested, and marshaled to particular political ends when fixed to specific locales. In fact, the proliferation of Spanish-language periodicals published in London—including Andre Bello's *Repertorio Americano*, Blanco White's *El Español*, Miranda's *El Columbiano*, and Rudolph Ackerman's *Variedades*—not only provides, as Diego Saglia has argued, ample proof of the deep, pervasive interest in Spain in early-nineteenth-century Britain, but also attests to the centrality of London as an organizing site of a rich textual network connecting Spain, Britain, the Caribbean, South America, and by extension Africa, the Mediterranean, and the U. S.

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion of the so-called «Liberal Revolution» in Spain in 1808, see Burdiel.

<sup>9</sup> Nowhere is the dilemma facing Britain on the issue of Latin American Independence more evident than in William Pitt's ambivalent response to repeated pleas for British support. Although Pitt welcomed at different times eager Spanish-American Revolutionaries, rather than risk another open break with Spain, the young Prime Minister remained content for the time being to continue his unofficial endorsement of frontier intrigue, illegal contraband trade, and other surreptitious New World interventions; see Kaufmann's chapter on «The Basic Dilemma» (1951: 1-17).

<sup>10</sup> Nanora Sweet's short but concise article on the influence of British interests in Latin America on British literary practices was among the first to consider the relationship between the Spanish-speaking world and the development of British romantic literature. Due to the highly volatile and precarious nature of Britain's relationship with Spain on the issue of Latin America, according to Sweet, British writers often found in Latin America a «dynamic horizon» of the British literary imagination (1997: 141).

Perhaps no other person more obviously illustrates the compelling arguments of transatlantic studies as José María Blanco White.<sup>11</sup> The grandson of William White, an Irish Catholic refugee who transplanted his family to Seville in the early eighteenth century to escape the penal laws and exploit the opportunities of the Spanish Atlantic trade, Blanco White grew up in commercial family whose trading networks extended from Málaga, Cádiz, and Seville to the Canaries, Bordeaux, and the Americas. His Spanish mother, Doña Gertrudis Crespo y Neve herself boasted important transatlantic connections, the most important of which, and no doubt most interesting to a North American audience, is her uncle Juan Crespí, the Governor of the Californias between 1775 and 1782 and the founder of Los Angeles. Although Blanco White settled for the priesthood, he was a true child of the enlightenment, an *ilustrado* gaining a reputation in Spain as a writer and intellectual, an advocate of reform, and, as we will see, a relentless political agitator. When the war broke out in Spain in 1808, Blanco White joined the Spanish resistance against Napoleon and remained in Spain until 1810 when, convinced that Spain would eventually fall, he left Seville for London. There, he became an important member of the Holland House, an influential coterie of Foxite Whigs who combined Whig ideology with support of the Spanish cause. As a poet, novelist, literary critic, translator, teacher, and theologian, Blanco White attracted the attention of major romantic-era writers in Britain, including Coleridge, who considered Blanco White's poem «Night and Death» «the finest and most grandly conceived Sonnet in the language»,<sup>12</sup> Robert Southey, who enlisted Blanco White in his campaign of Catholic Emancipation, and Felicia Hemans, whose Iberian poetry she wrote partly as a response to Blanco White (cited in Blanco White, 1845: 1, 439).<sup>13</sup> So widespread was Blanco White's reputation that it is not unimaginable to agree with his biographer Martin Murphy's assessment that, «There was scarcely a major figure in the political and cultural world of Spain in the first quarter, and of England in the second quarter, of the nineteenth century with whom he did not come in contact, and on some he exercised a decisive influence» (1989: ix).

While Blanco White's easy movement across geographical, linguistic, and religious boundaries —Blanco White converted from Roman Catholicism to Anglicanism and eventually to Unitarianism— makes him an interesting figure of transnational movement, I want to focus in this essay on his journal *El Español*, a London-based journal he began shortly after arriving in Britain, which he wrote in Spanish and distributed to Spain and Latin America between 1810 and 1815. By directly addressing the question of Latin America by attempting to mediate a political compromise between the revolutionary arguments of Latin American *Independistas* with Spanish imperial interests, *El Español* initiated a transatlantic discourse that directly confronted the conflict between the principles of liberal thought and the principles of empire. Consequently, widening our transatlantic perspectives to include multilingual world of Spain and Latin America —including Portugal and Brazil— provides us with important critical insight into one of the most recalcitrant problems in the study of political thought of the long eighteenth century, namely how were imperial nations like Britain able to pursue a global empire

<sup>11</sup> An account of Blanco White's life written in English can be found in Martin Murphy's 1989 biography of the Spanish exile. For a more up-to-date and extensive biography of Blanco White, see Durán López.

<sup>12</sup> Coleridge's comment was only slightly less exaggerated than Leigh Hunt's evaluation of the poem that «[i]n point of *thought* the sonnet stands supreme, perhaps, above all in any language» (1816: vol. 1, 259).

<sup>13</sup> In 1824, Felicia Hemans wrote regarding her famous long poem «The Forest Sanctuary» «I am at present engaged upon a poem of some length, the idea of which was suggested to me by some passages in your friend Mr. Blanco White's delightful writings». The writings to which she referred were *Letters from Spain* by Don Leucadio Doblado. For more on Hemans's relationship with Blanco White, see Sweet (2010).



abroad premised on subjugation and exclusion while developing into a modern liberal state based on a national ideology of universal equality of free and acting citizens.

In his book *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, Uday Singh Mehta explores what he calls the troubled relationship between British liberal thought—organized around the principle of universal individual liberty and democratic and representative forms of government—and empire, «marked by the systematic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and “types” of people» (1999: 46).<sup>14</sup> Concentrating mainly on political theorists like John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, and Thomas Macaulay, Mehta concludes what perhaps most literary critics already instinctively know, that not only is there no contradiction between liberal thought and empire, but liberal thought—particularly through its notion of the civilizing mission—in fact provides the ideological force behind the advancement of empire.

But in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, this connection was neither obvious nor unproblematic. Perhaps no where is this fraught relationship between empire and liberal thought more clearly expressed than in the abolitionist literature that proliferated in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Poems about the slave trade often find themselves troubled by an awareness of the tension between its ideals of universal emancipation and the imperial imperative of the civilizing mission. Of the many abolitionist poems that could be cited, Hannah More's «Slavery, A Poem» is one of the best in illustrating such structural entanglements. Though she argues for the dignity of slaves as human beings, More, like many of her contemporaries, cannot escape her racist assumptions or imperialist attitudes. Africans, she argues, for example, «have heads to think, and hearts to feel», but their souls act with «erring zeal» (1788: lines 67; 68). As a result, they, like the British radicals she curiously invokes at the beginning of the poem, need to be contained, their «wild vigour of a savage root» civilized by Christianity, through which our unenlightened brethren can be brought into the folds of civilization (1788: 74).

The poem, however, is much more than a straightforward propaganda piece for the civilizing mission. Much of «Slavery» expresses anxiety about the critique of empire that unintentionally emerges in the poem as a result of More's abolitionist arguments. Attempting to clarify her intentions, the poet at one point asks,

Does thirst of empire, does desire of fame,  
(For these are specious crimes,) our rage inflame?  
No: sordid lust of gold their [slaves] fate controls,  
The basest appetite of basest souls. (1788: 125-28)

More's resistance to the idea that the «thirst for empire» is inherently wrong and her attribution of the evil of slavery instead to «sordid lust» allows her to champion the cause of emancipation without upsetting the logic of empire. The parenthetical aside, however, at once deflecting attention from the poem and yet integral to its meter, delays the formulation of the poem's central question, creating an uneasy tension between the poet's nervous interrogation and resolute reply. The emphatic «no», made more determined by the syntactical deductive colon separating the monosyllabic answer from the more involved explanation that follows, not only abruptly interrupts the iambic pentameter

<sup>14</sup> These potentially reductive descriptions of liberal thought and empire admittedly require much more elaboration than space allows. My intention is only to highlight an ideological tension one finds expressed in romantic literature that Mehta has identified in terms of the clash between liberalism and empire.

of the poem, but in doing so calls attention unintentionally to the so-called «specious crimes» the poet works very hard to deny. In the context of the poem's opening question wherein Liberty personified is pointedly asked why her «genial beams [are] to parts confin'd?» the answer the poem wants to avoid but cannot seem to be able to entirely deflect is that perhaps the «thirst of empire» and «desire of fame» is indeed what one cannot help but blame (1788: 12).

More's apprehension about the possible connections between her abolitionist arguments and the compelling critique of the British empire beginning to emerge in the poem eventually leads to a further and more encumbered explanation about what she actually means. Finally naming the unnamable, that is, exactly toward whom she is directing her anger, the poet directly addresses the «White Savage», whose identification depends entirely on *his* association with Spanish colonial violence:

Panting to tame wide earth's remotest bound;  
All Cortez murder'd, all Columbus found;  
O'er plunder'd realms to reign, detested Lord,  
Make millions wretched, and thyself abhorr'd. (1788: 219-22)

By contrast, Britain's own James Cook represents a form of benevolent colonialism and gives force to the poem's greatest lamentation,

Had those advent'rous spirits who explore  
Thro' ocean's trackless wastes, the far-sought shore;  
...  
Had these possess'd, O COOK! Thy gentle mind,  
Thy love of arts, thy love of humankind;  
Had these pursued thy mild and liberal plan,  
DISCOVERERS had not been a curse to man! (1788: 231-2; 235-38)

What thus starts out as an argument for emancipation turns out in reality to be a full-fledged defense of empire.

Hannah More's apology for empire based as it were on an explicit denunciation of the Spanish was by no means peculiar to her abolitionist arguments. Famously Victor Frankenstein comes to a similar conclusion regarding the pursuit of empire, regretting that if only the Spanish had been inspired to treat the natives benevolently, «America would have been discovered more gradually, and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed» (Shelley 1999: 84). Southey also capitalized on this motif in *The Tale of Paraguay* (1825) by promoting, according to Fulford, his vision of «missionary colonialism», wherein paternalistic Britain would redeem the previous mistakes of Spain by teaching Protestant civilization (2001: par. 4). In fact, attention to British literary representations of Spain prior to 1808 suggests that indictment of Spanish colonial violence formed a major part of a British literary tradition preoccupied with questions of colonial ideology and practices. Largely relying on legendary accounts of Spanish colonial cruelty against the huge population of Amerindians —known in scholarship as the Black Legend— the emergence of what I call Spanish American conquest tales exploited well-established stereotypes of the Spaniard as cruel, inhumane, and barbaric as part of a renewed ideological warfare against the Spanish empire. William Robertson's *History of America* (first published in 1777, *History* will become important in my reading of Keats) arguably the most popular propagator of the Black Legend in Britain, became the foundational text

for a particular description of the contrast between the British and Spanish empires. His account of the discovery and conquest of America explicitly analyzing the «Errors» of Spain in terms of political economy freely draws on the stories of Spanish cruelty by de las Casas, Francisco López de Gómara, and others for his philosophical history of stadial progression (1777, I.xx). The Spaniard's «lust for gold, Or lust of conquest» (More's words) was not simply a tired trope for Robertson, but an economic explanation for the failure of the Spanish colonial system based on accumulation instead of trade.<sup>15</sup>

In 1808, however, Britain's relationship to Spain had been radically changed by Napoleon's invasion of the country. Now fighting for their independence, Spain became almost instantaneously a symbol not of an empire gone bad, but a people whose struggle embodied the principles of liberty and emancipation. As Richard Brinsley Sheridan's speech in the House of Commons made clear, British intervention on behalf of Spain was part of Britain's moral imperative to spread liberty throughout the globe:

Let Spain see, that we are not inclined to stint the services we had it in our power to render her; that we were not actuated by the desire of any petty advantage to ourselves; but that our exertions were to be solely directed to the attainment of the grand and general object, the emancipation of the world. (1866: 5.370)

Coleridge, however, was even more concise in his evaluation of the implications of the Spanish cause for Britain, arguing that Spain in fact brought Britain's world mission into sharp focus:

The Spanish contest has a separate and additional interest for Englishmen of genuine English principles: . . . it was the noble efforts of Spanish patriotism, that first restored us, without distinction of party, to our characteristic enthusiasm for *liberty*; and presenting it in its genuine form, incapable of being confounded with its French counterfeit, enabled us once more to utter the names of our Hampdens, Sidneys, and Russels, without hazard of alarming the quiet subject, or of offending the zealous loyalist. (1978: vol. 3, 38)

While Spain's *Guerra de Independencia* may have clarified Britain's global enterprise, the political situation in Spain proved much more complicated than British writers would like to have imagined. As the War of Independence got underway, another battle with far more reaching implications had also begun. Although the Spanish resented the installation of Napoleon's brother Joseph Bonaparte on the Spanish throne, many reformers, known by their enemies as *afrancesados* —French sympathizers— championed Napoleonic reform as the best chance for modernizing Spain. Other reformers, however, self-dubbed *liberales* were not only unwilling to sacrifice their national sovereignty for the sake of modern reform, but also rejected the mapping of abstract formulations of French theory onto Spanish history and national character.

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<sup>15</sup> Robertson's depiction of Spain as a failed empire helped give rise to a large body of work on Spanish America. Joel Barlow's *The Vision of Columbus* (1787), Henry Brooke's *Montezuma* (1789), Thomas Morton's *Columbus*, Edward Jerningham's *The Fall of Mexico* (1776), John Thelwall's *The Incas, or, The Peruvian Virgin* (1792), and William Sotheby's *The Siege of Cuzco* (1800) are just a few examples of the literature on the New World, particularly the drama, that proliferated during this period. Most popular and widespread by far, however, were the seemingly endless adaptations of Kotzebue's *Die Spanier in Peru* (1796), including plays by William Dunlap, Thomas Dutton, Robert Heron, Matthew Lewis, and —most famously— Richard Sheridan.



Among these Spanish reformers was José María Blanco White. A rising star among the Spanish liberal intelligentsia which included Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, Manuel José Quintana, and Isidoro Antillón, Blanco White began in 1809 a weekly journal entitled *Semanario Patriótico* in which the issues of reform were debated, political principles laid out, and constitutional developments publicly discussed «en la grande empresa», in the words of one contributor, «de constituer la nación» and «constituir el Estado» (1811: 386; 1812: 152).<sup>16</sup> Among the most controversial arguments it advanced related to the issue of national sovereignty, which Blanco White argued resided in the people alone. As Juan Pérez Villamil asserted, «los Reyes son para el pueblo, y no el pueblo para los Reyes» (1808: 46).

After the collapse of the Central Junta in 1810, Blanco White, uncertain of the fate of the Iberian Peninsula, finally left Seville for London, transporting the political lessons he had learned in Spain to Britain, where he continued his fight for reform now as an exile on foreign soil. Once in London, Blanco White transplanted his Spanish liberal ideas to the Holland House. Lord Holland and his wife Elizabeth, along with prominent Whig intellectual Lord John Russell, had visited Spain on the eve of revolution, became intimately acquainted with Spanish society, spoke directly to the local juntas, and carried on correspondence with prominent liberal intellectuals like Jovellanos and Quintana. Viewing Spain as the perfect testing ground for the viability and establishment of a modern liberal state, the Hollands had arranged for a full draft of a constitution to be sent to Spain along with a copy of the so-called Red Book, which contained detailed description of the proceeding of the British parliament, along with instructions on how to refashion the Cortes in the form of the Westminster assembly—an illustration of transnational politics at its best.<sup>17</sup> As an insider to the political situation in Spain, Blanco White soon found himself encouraged by the Whig Holland House to continue his journalistic activities in London in the form of a Spanish-language periodical that would not only represent the views of the Cádiz government, but also, at the encouragement of the Tory Richard Wellesley and the insistence of the Foreign Office, provide a favorable interpretation of British foreign policy back to Spain and Spanish America.<sup>18</sup> The journal was then to act as a two way conduit between Britain and Spain, a medium of cross-cultural exchange that opened up a space for political dialogue among groups of different political, social, and cultural backgrounds. Written in Spanish, published in London, sponsored by Tories, supported by Whigs, and distributed to Spain and Latin America, *El Español* truly proved to be a product of transnational and transatlantic imaginings. Subject to translation, interpretation, and, in Blanco White's mind, misappropriation, *El*

<sup>16</sup> As Murphy accurately points out, *Semanario Patriótico* was the first free journal of political opinion to be published in Spain. First published shortly after the onset of *La Guerra de Independencia* and concluding on the eve of the promulgation of the 1812 liberal constitution, *Semanario Patriótico* is an important document in the development of Spanish liberal thought.

<sup>17</sup> It is doubtful that the intentions of the Hollands was simply to model the Spanish state after the British or merely to infuse Spanish liberal thought with Whig ideology. The promise of a constitution codifying political principles perceived as untenable in Britain was no doubt a major allure of what was increasingly seen as the Spanish political experiment. The transmutation of Whig ideology into new forms of liberal thought is one major consequence of such transnational exchange.

<sup>18</sup> Lord Holland was clearly aware of the potential conflict of interests between the Whig Holland House and Tory government. In a September 26, 1810 letter to Blanco White, Lord Holland saw it fit to warn Blanco White against offending the government: «I hope that you will take care in any communication you have with L. Wellesley to convey to him strong assurances of your willingness & anxiety to attend to the wishes of the Government & to promote the chief & original object of your publication viz a Union of Sentiments & a mutual confidence between all the remains of the Spanish Empire & Great Britain» (1810: Holland to White).

*Español* became a crucial document in the interpretation and re-interpretation of global affairs, particularly as it related to the development of transatlantic liberal thought.

Despite Holland's attempt, in Murphy's estimation, to temper Blanco White's Spanish radicalism with English moderation, Blanco White opened his journal with a scathing criticism of the governing body in Spain. In an article entitled «Reflexiones generales sobre la revolución española», Blanco White attacked the Central Junta for its «ineptitud, y . . . ambicion» and for undermining the people's revolutionary enthusiasm with inane internal bureaucratic discussions. In a radical call for complete social and political transformation in Spain, «una revolución verdadera» (1810: vol. 1, 26), Blanco White passionately decreed,

Españoles: jamas se purifica una grande masa sin una fermentacion violenta: la mas suave y saludable es la que en los cuerpos políticos ocasionan las luces. Empezad por dar el mas libre curso á estas: Dexad que todos piensen, todos hablen, todos escriban, y no emplééis otra fuerza que la del convencimiento. Desterrad todo lo que se parezca á vuestro antiguo gobierno. Si el ardor de una revolucion os atemoriza, si las preocupaciones os ponen miedo con la idea de la libertad misma, creed que estais destinados á ser perpetuamente esclavos. (1810: vol. 1, 26)

While such incendiary remarks alarmed some British officials,<sup>19</sup> in Spain, the Spanish intelligentsia were outright outraged. As Blanco White's former friend Quintana wrote to Lord Holland,

It is galling, and more than galling, for one who is thoroughly familiar with the course our affairs have taken and with the spirit which has informed us, to see this poisonous picture in which truth is distorted, motives misrepresented and old wives' tales of Cadiz and Seville retailed as if they were facts—all to discredit a government which no longer exists. . . I do not know if Blanco will achieve his purpose . . . but whatever result he obtains, we honest Spaniards will forever resent his imprudent publication. (cited in Martin Murphy, 1989: 67)

While Blanco White's denunciation of the Central Junta seemed to clearly mark him as a radical, his commentary on Spanish America would present quite a different picture.

Although Blanco White's resistance to reworking and reinterpreting his Spanish ideals within Holland's more moderate British framework incited the wrath of Spanish liberals, it was only after he projected his liberal fantasies across the Atlantic that Blanco White opened up a transatlantic discourse that would have a profound impact on world affairs. Despite the call of Spanish officials in Spain for its colonies to recognize the central authority of the Supreme Junta in Cádiz, provinces throughout Latin America began setting up their own local governing bodies, which they claimed acted in the name of the King, but were in essence the first movement toward independence. Defending the colonies' right to self-government during the current political crisis, Blanco White had declared in the second issue of *El Español* that in the absence of the King, sovereignty had reverted back to the people, and therefore the Peninsula had no authority over them. In writing about the overthrow of Spanish colonial authorities in Caracas in 1810, Blanco White expressed his view that the colonies had only acted as the Peninsula itself had done and did so only as a matter of political exigency:

<sup>19</sup> See Martin Murphy (1989: 66).

[L]a moderacion y la beneficencia. Esto es lo que respiran las proclamas, y las providencias del Nuevo gobierno de Venezuela. . . al ver que solo tratan de mirar por su seguridad, y de hacer lo que todos los pueblos de España han puesto en práctica, esto es, formar un gobierno interino, durante la ausencia del monarca . . . Los americanos no pensarán jamás en separarse de la corona de España. (1810: vol. 1, 316-7)

As a result of his bold defense of Latin American autonomy, which he felt was only temporary, Blanco White was awarded honorary citizen of Caracas and championed as a defender of Latin America. Yet, Blanco White's confidence that Latin America was neither teeming with rebels nor committed to permanent independence would turn out to be dead wrong.<sup>20</sup>

As political agitations in Latin America began to intensify and mount, Blanco White, realizing the revolutionary implications of his radical agenda, now began to temper his incendiary commentary. Directing himself now to the revolutionaries in Caracas, Blanco White now began to urge moderation in the pages of *El Español*, suggesting that patience and restraint would result in an alleviation of their condition in due time. As Blanco White warned,

Que la independencia considerada en general, es un bien, nadie puede dudarlo; pero tampoco puede dudarse que hay infinitas clases de independencia, y que no todas ellas son un bien en todas circunstancias, ni á todas ellas pueden aspirar indistintamente todos. . . . Esto no depende de los derechos abstractos y primitivos que cada Estado ó individuo tiene; sino del conjunto de circunstancias en que se halla. (1811: vol. 4, 44)

According to Blanco White, «La América española no ha pasado aun el noviciado de la libertad, y quererlo hacer todo de repente y á la vez, paredes, techos, y cimientos es exponerse á no hacer mas que un edificio de apariencia que se vendria abaxo al primer soplo. La América Española por necesidad será independiente en algun tiempo (no sabré decir quando) . . . Pero si los americanos quieren no retardar este período; no lo apresuren» (1811: vol 3, 303). Such pragmatic politics was a far cry from Blanco White's more radical call to «Desterrad todo lo que se parezca á vuestro antiguo gobierno» announced only a year earlier (1810: vol. 1, 26). As it turned out, revolutionaries in Latin America preferred the earlier radical Blanco to this more moderate one.

If Blanco White believed that the American leaders were to be passive receptors, readers and heeders of his advice rather than thinking and acting agents of their own liberation, he was woefully misguided. Through revolutionaries like Simón Bolívar, Francisco de Miranda, and Fray Servando de Mier the empire not only read, but also wrote back. In his well-known letter from Jamaica, Simón Bolívar, who first met Blanco White in July 1810, draws explicitly on arguments from *El Español* to provide his rationale for revolution: «Sobre la naturaleza de los gobiernos españoles, sus decretos conminatorios y hostiles . . . , hay escritos, del mayor mérito, en el periódico *El Español* cuyo autor es el señor Blanco; y estando allí esta parte de nuestra historia muy bien tratada, me limito

<sup>20</sup> Expressing his reservations about the capacity of America for independence, Blanco White wrote in *El Español*, «La dificultad esencial de constituirse la América Española en Estados Independientes, consiste en que, la mayor parte de su poblacion no está capaz de tomar parte directa en el gobierno; y la que lo está no puede unirse entre sí para gobernar á la otra» (4: 420). Juan Germán Roscio, the editor of *La Gaceta de Caracas*, would later explain that Blanco White simply underestimated the moderation and loyalty of the people of Venezuela; see note 21.

a indicarlo» (1810: 20). Reading against the original intentions of the author and reinterpreting the meaning of Blanco White's ideas for Latin America, Bolívar asserts «los derechos» of Latin Americans as free citizens to rebel against their «desnaturalizada madrastra», for, as he argues, «un pueblo es esclavo cuando el gobierno, por su esencia o por sus vicios, huella y usurpa los derechos del ciudadano o súbdito» (1815: 18, 12, 18). In fighting for «estatuyendo leyes generales en favor de la libertad civil, de imprenta y otras», Bolívar simply assumed the freedoms naturally extended to the *Peninsulares* and adopted the very language being developed in Spain in describing their own political pursuits (1815: 21). Although Bolívar shared Blanco White's reservations about the viability of erecting republics or federations throughout Latin America, that did not stop him from seeking British support in «la sagrada causa de la libertad» (1815: 30).

Bolívar, however, was not the only revolutionary, contrary to intentions, to be inspired by Blanco White. Juan Germán Roscio, considered by many to be the true ideologue of the independence movement in Venezuela, often turned to Blanco White to justify the American insurgency to the British, with whom he struggled to gain support. Citing Blanco White's argument that the Spanish people had the right in the absence of the King to construct a government of their own, Roscio contended that the same principles also applied to the *caraqueños*: «Así lo habrá usted visto en el n.º 2 de *El Español*, periódico que está escribiéndose en esa corte, Caracas se halló en el mismo caso; y sabe usted cuáles y cuántas son las consecuencias que nacen de este principio» (cited in Pons, 2006: 303). A year later, despite Blanco White's admonishment to the revolutionaries in Caracas, Roscio continued to enlist the help of *El Español* for his cause and excused Blanco White's objections to Spanish American independence by dismissing them as a matter of misunderstanding.<sup>21</sup> In this way, Roscio intentionally distorted the message of the journal to force it to conform to his political program. Other revolutionaries similarly selectively cited *El Español* for support of their political agendas, suppressing at times passages that urged moderation in favor of a more radical interpretation of Blanco White's political principles,<sup>22</sup> strategically reproducing political commentary from the journal in local papers to suggest European support,<sup>23</sup> and introducing concepts from its pages in congressional debates over constitutional issues.

The various intentional misreadings of the politics of *El Español*, can be seen, in one sense, as a clear instance of «transculturation», a process by which, as Mary Louise Pratt writes, «subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture» (2008: 7). From a historical standpoint, however, what interests me here is the way in which the translation of liberal ideas from Europe into an American context opened up a transatlantic discourse in which the interests of the Spanish empire were brought into direct conflict with the Latin American ideals of universal emancipation. The Spanish liberal intelligentsia had early on sought to extend the liberal privileges of the *Peninsulares* to their American counterparts, announcing in 1808 that the American provinces were not colonies, but integral parts of the

21 In November 1810 in *La Gaceta de Caracas*, Roscio claimed that had Blanco White visited Caracas he would have recognized «la moderación, la lealtad, y la subordinación civil de los pardos» (the people of color that Blanco White had so feared) and come to support the revolution that his political principles no doubt supported. See Pons (2006: 305-306).

22 Antonio Nariño in the November 1811 issue of *La Bagatela*, for example, carefully edited out, according to Pons, certain passages that encouraged reconciliation with Spain and British mediation of the crisis in Spanish America in an *El Español* article that otherwise supported the principle of independence.

23 Among the regional papers that made use of *El Español*, the *Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, the *Aurora de Chile*, *El Peruano*, and the *Correo Americano del Sur* in Mexico are among the most prominent in disseminating the ideas of Blanco White throughout the Americas.

monarchy, equal in their rights to the divisions of Spain herself. When leaders began to realize, however, that the empire, with 14 to 16 million inhabitants could outvote them on issues of imperial legislation Spanish officials began to seek an effective means to limit that electoral power. With a great many colonial voters being Natives, Africans, mestizos, and mulattoes, *Peninsulares* invoked a racial discourse that denied representation in the Cortes to anyone with an admixture of African blood. This in effect disenfranchised the vast majority of the population of Spanish America and legitimized the logic behind allowing only thirty of the 107 delegates originally promised to the colonies to vote on colonial policy affecting them. Thus, the implications of extending citizenship to its colonial subjects caused Spain to rethink the exportation of policies that made sense domestically to its overseas empire.<sup>24</sup>

Although Blanco White may have indeed been genuinely surprised by Venezuela's reformulation of the reformist principles articulated in *El Español*, it is hard to imagine that he did not realize the difficulty involved in developing a rationale that simultaneously provided for liberal developments at home as it justified the subordination of the empire abroad. The proliferation of selective readings and the refraction and distortion of its ideas no doubt invested Blanco White's publication with transformative energies. But as an object of transatlantic refashionings, *El Español* also clearly made visible what might be called the liberal dilemma arising from the need to reconcile the logic of empire with the idea of universal liberty. Blanco White's problematic recontextualization of ideas and agendas across Europe and ultimately across the Atlantic exemplifies both the limits and possibilities of the transatlantic imagination wherein writing and ideas become invented and reinvented for specific purposes corresponding to different sets of expectations. In rethinking Spanish liberal politics within a British political framework, resisting the moderation that that framework demanded, and reissuing these ideas to a colonial audience that ultimately reinvented them, Blanco White's project indeed reveals not only the transnational nature of the development of political ideology in the nineteenth century, but, perhaps more significantly, reminds us of the importance of the Spanish-speaking world in that development of liberal thought.

#### KEATS AND THE TRANSATLANTIC IMAGINATION

As Chuck Rzepka's 2002 essay in the *Keats-Shelley Journal* attests, much of the interpretative energy expended on Keats's «On Looking into Chapman's Homer» focuses on what critics and editors have long identified as a mistake in historical accuracy in Keats's identification of Cortez rather than Balboa as the discoverer of the Pacific. Until Tennyson pointed out in a footnote to Keats's Sonnet in Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury*, that «History requires here Balboa», the «mistake» had been caught by neither friends nor editors, but has since Tennyson been seen as signaling Keats's petty education (1861: 298). Rzepka building on Wicker's argument makes the convincing case that Cortez is intentional and is used to further the poem's theme of belatedness: Cortez as a belated arrival to Balboa's original discovery of the Pacific corresponds to Keats's belated arrival to poetry and sublime ambitions. While Rzepka has made it no longer possible to blithely accept this as an error, I want to suggest that the origins of the confusion among critics

<sup>24</sup> Further complicating matters, was of course Britain's role in the whole affair. Although limited autonomy in the colonies meant a loosening of trade restrictions to Spanish America, complete autonomy in the South Atlantic was even better, and both Latin America and Spain knew it. Britain's so-called «benevolent neutrality» raised suspicions among Cádiz liberals who knew lucrative markets awaited an eager imperial power ready to pounce on a free America.



—namely that Cortez is described in terms similar to Balboa— calls attention to what I have been arguing in this paper is the «structural duplicity» (to borrow Paul Giles's phrase) of the transatlantic imagination (2003: 64). Situating our reading of the poem within the Spanish transatlantic context I have been outlining in this paper, a discourse Keats not only understood, but actively participated in, I hope to show how Keats's reading of transatlantic history provided a critical focus for his sonnet.

As critics have duly noted, the theme of discovery and travel not only predominate in the sonnet, but operate as the controlling metaphors of the poem. Through the act of reading, Keats writes, the poet is able to travel to the «Realms of Gold» across the «wide expanse» of the Atlantic to «Western islands» and explore the «goodly states and Kingdoms» which «bards in fealty to Apollo hold» (2003: lines 1; 5; 3; 2; 4). More important than the theme of travel, however, is the process of self-discovery at the center of the poem wherein the poet eventually finds himself able to «breathe the pure serene» (2003: line 7). Travel thus becomes a metaphor for not only reading, but also of introspection in which Keats finds his vocation for poetry and his pursuit of sublime ambitions.

That process of self-discovery, as we know from Keats's biography, began with his education at Enfield, a dissenting school, as Nicholas Roe writes, dedicated to a progressive and liberal education focusing on modern sciences and modern history. In his *Recollections of Writers*, Charles Cowden Clarke, Keats's school friend and mentor, tells us about that «memorable night» (1878: 128) when he and Keats sat down together one evening to read «some of the "famousest" passages» (1878: 129) of Homer in Chapman's translation:

Chapman supplied us with many an after-treat; but it was in the teeming wonderment of this his first introduction, that, when I came down to breakfast the next morning, I found upon my table a letter with no other enclosure than his famous sonnet, «On First Looking into Chapman's Homer». (1878: 130)

That anecdote, meant as an illustration of Keats's «indefatigable energy», «tolerably retentive memory», and his voracious appetite for reading, was also part of Clarke's elaboration of Keats's education and writing in terms of the school's larger agenda (1878: 122, 123). As Nicholas Roe tells us, that larger agenda was decidedly politically oriented toward encouraging a liberal and progressive culture of dissent (1997: 27). Among the things this school did to do this was encourage the study of modern history and modern science as opposed to classical education, which to his later critics would prove the epitome of his Cockneyism. That appeal is seen in the sources of the poem. Both William Robertson's *History of America* and Bonnycastle's *Introduction to Astronomy*, which critics acknowledge to be major sources of the poem, deal with Enlightenment projects.

Keats's encounter with Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, which Clarke indicates Keats read while at Enfield, suggested a Keats much more politically committed to modern affairs than has been traditionally understood. For it was in reading this controversial journal of radical thought that Clarke argues Keats «no doubt laid the foundation of his love of civil and religious liberty» (qtd. in Roe, 1997: 8). Clarke would later write that «[w]ith regard to Keats's political opinions I have little doubt that his whole civil creed was comprised in the master principle of "universal liberty"—viz: "Equal and stern justice to all, from the duke to the dustman"» (1874: 202).

Attention to Keats's liberal education and perspective, particularly with respect to his desire for «universal Liberty», reinforces the formal associations of the poem between the metaphor of discovery and the idea of Enlightenment progress. In comparing the process

of his emerging poetic sensibilities with the discovery of a new planet —«then felt I like some watcher of the skies / When a new planet swims into his ken»— Keats associates the progress of the imagination with scientific advancement and new knowledge (lines 10–11). The discovery of new planets in a scientific sense is echoed by the discovery of new worlds in a historical one, bringing together in the image of planetary exploration and transatlantic movement of the imagination the inspiration for the advancement of scientific, historical, and poetic knowledge. Keats would later make similar moves in his famous letter to Benjamin Bailey on the Grand March of Intellect, where he expresses his faith in the «general and gregarious advance of intellect» (1: 282). That pursuit of ever new intellectual and poetical horizons is concentrated in the image of the poetic «I» seeking the «wide expanse» of which he had heard, but has yet to experience. In the forward-looking transition that occurs at the beginning of the second quatrain, wherein the poet remembers the legendary expanse he has only read about, the phrase «goodly states and Kingdoms seen» in the first half of the octave begins to take on the symbolic valence of the past, an Old World in which the realms of gold and feudal relationship of «bards in fealty» conjures up images of archaic monarchies and stale economic structures. The new world, by contrast, appears unwritten, a landscape of possibility and imagination, a new phase in the progress of the imagination.

The enlightenment trajectory of the poem in part informed by Robertson's historiographical project in *The History of America*, begins, however, to take on more specific political valences in the context of Keats's specific interest in America. Keats no doubt expressed a personal investment in America after his brother and sister-in-law George and Georgiana Keats moved to Kentucky at the end of June 1818. But Keats, like many of his contemporaries, shared in the enthusiasm for the Latin American struggle for independence in the second decade of the nineteenth century. In fact, as Rzepka provocatively suggests, it is even possible to view Keats's Chapman sonnet as «reflecting, in part, an interest in Bolívar and the struggle for Latin American independence» (2002: 54). There is evidence that Keats not only knew about affairs abroad, but was to a degree invested in the question of Latin America. As Rzepka points out, Keats's reading of Hunt's *Examiner* would have alerted him to recent reports on such major events as the emancipation proclamation for all slaves in New Granada, the death of Francisco de Miranda, the present state of the Mexican revolution, and other «interesting intelligence from South America», which the *Examiner* entitled its article of pro-American sympathy (806). Written in October 1816, only months after Bolívar's failed campaign in Haiti was reported by Hunt in the *Examiner*, Keats's sonnet may even reflect an anxious attempt to recover the political imperative for revolution in the South Atlantic, aligning the freedom of the imagination with the emancipation of Spanish America.

Whatever Keats may have actually wanted to achieve in his poem, it is clear that at the beginning of the sestet, the poem's celebration of the powers of the imagination begin to break down. The line «Then felt I like some watcher of the skies», I have suggested, solidifies the poem's identification of imagination with discovery and new knowledge, expressing an underlying faith in enlightenment progress. But it is the second simile comparing the poet with «stout Cortez», as critics have noted, that creates the uneasy identification of the imagination with colonial violence (11). What I want to emphasize in my interpretation, however, is the stressed conjunction «or», from which the second simile unfolds as both a synonymous and an alternative expression to the «watcher of the skies» (9). In the first scenario, Keats imagines Cortez as simply another discoverer like the astronomer who discovers new planets as they swim into their ken. Such an identification has in fact dominated most readings of the poem, which explains why Keats

has often been accused of historical inaccuracy: meaning to simply compare himself to another discoverer, Keats must have accidentally substituted Cortez for Balboa, the original discoverer of the Pacific. But in the second scenario following from a reading of the conjunction «or» as an indicator of an alternative to follow, Cortez stands as only one choice between two mutually exclusive possibilities. Either the poet is an enlightened discoverer opening to the world new possibilities of change and independence, much like the Latin American revolutionaries themselves imagined for their political programs, «or» he is a conqueror that surveys new land «with eagle eye[d]» ambition. But perhaps even more troubling than the alternative the poet posits for himself is the possibility that even the discoverer is at the end a conqueror. Again, calling attention to Keats's supposed slip up, the substitution of Cortez for Balboa perhaps most troublingly signals the displacement of discovery by conquest.

In highlighting the liberal dilemma, Keats's «On First Looking into Chapman's Homer» finds itself in much the same position as Blanco White: unable to reconcile imperial logic with the liberal ideals it wants to espouse, the poem eventually stalls and ends in silence. Keats's intertwining of the questions of imperial thought with the poetics of progress and liberation illustrates the structural duplicity of the transatlantic imagination. Like Hannah More's abolitionist poem, which found itself unable to extricate itself from issues of empire as it developed its poetics of emancipation, Keats's Chapman sonnet finds itself swept into the liberal dilemma precisely at the moment it began looking across the Atlantic. In the same way that Blanco White's failed mediation of a transnational discourse proved frustrating and overwhelming, Keats's poetic attempts to mediate the liberating potential and rapaciousness of the imagination gives way to at times incoherent logic and finally paralysis. As agents of the transatlantic imaginary, talking to and talking past each other, these writers are caught in an ultimately inescapable conflict, forcing them to regard the future with wild surmise.

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